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Students of Japanese history (graduate students with language competence seeking a career in Japanese studies, undergraduates studying the Japanese language, and non-linguist undergraduates and graduate students studying Japanese history for a variety of reasons) have to deal with the Japanese language in different ways. They should all, however, seriously consider the time it takes to acquire a "basic mastery" of the language (roughly three times as long as for a Romance language). They should also consider the content of the language study, considered even more important by the author than the time element involved. Even advanced students who are linguistically competent to read scholarly articles on Japanese history find them difficult, not because of the language, but because of the content. The time an undergraduate student of history spends in language study could be more profitably used to take courses in anthropology, literature in translation, political science, or sociology. While Japanese language study "has utility at every level for generally recognized purposes," language instruction should not be expected to help in understanding Japanese history. Conversely, the author feels that the study of Japanese history does not complement language training to a significant degree. (AMM)

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# THE STUDENT OF JAPANESE HISTORY VS. THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

The use of the word "versus" in this title is suggestive of a contest between the student of Japanese history and the Japanese language - a living obstacle which must be surmounted, or, in many instances, should simply be circumnavigated.

The two elements in this contest are not constants, for there are different students of history with varying purposes. One might classify the history students in three general groups: (1) graduate students with language competence seeking a career in Japanese studies, (2) the undergraduate who is studying Japanese, and (3) the non-linguist undergraduate and graduate students who study Japanese history for a variety of reasons. Each of these groups needs to deal with the Japanese language in different ways.

Those students who engage actively in learning Japanese, confront the language in two important aspects: time and content.

The aspect of time confronts any student of a foreign language, but the matter is more distressing to the student of Japanese who is forced to deal with one of the most extraordinarily complex languages devised by man. The adaptation of the Chinese script to write Japanese has been termed by Professor Reischauer "a major historical tragedy".[1] It is estimated that even Japanese school children must spend the equivalent of three years learning the Japanese writing system.[2] Competence in reading, not to mention writing, simply requires a longer period to acquire with Japanese than it does with most other languages.

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One yardstick suggesting the magnitude of the task is a comparison of the times alloted by the Defense Language Institute for the training of translators in Japanese and in a Romance Language. The factor is 3 to 1: seventy-eight weeks for Japanese and twenty-six weeks for a Romance Langauge. It may be arguable, but the factor of 3:1 does not seem far out of line in judging the time required to gain competence in a civilian university.

In his study, Japan in American Education, Professor Morley wrote:

> "Experience shows that at least four normal years courses are needed for (such) a basic mastery, and in most cases it is not achieved without a period of residence and study in Japan."[3]

What this means is that as much as one-third of an undergraduate's time might be spent solely in the study of the Japanese language.

This basic requirement for a minimum of four years study before entering into specialization requiring "basic mastery" of the language is complicated by the general unavailability of courses at the secondary level. A few years ago, only 20 schools in the continental United States offered Japanese language courses, although an additional 30 did so in the State of Hawaii.[4] It would be most unusual for a high school student today to have an opportunity to study Japanese comparable to the opportunity I had to study four years of French and two years of German in a medium-sized, run-of-the-mill mid-Western high school even thirty years ago. Additionally, the undergraduate opportunities for studying Japanese are rather limited, although there has been considerable improvement in recent years.

Despite the comparative disadvantage of no early preparation, ways have been devised to minimize the time factor.[5] Combined use of NDEA

programs for financial assistance and special intensive courses make it possible to compress the four normal year courses into fifteen months. A student can begin his study of Japanese as a junior and acquire the "basic mastery" prior to graduate school. This is buying at the margin and something must be given up in the trade-off.

The graduate student who expects to write his dissertation in Japanese history may, of course, also be required to demonstrate a competence in Chinese. This adds months to language preparation, but certainly a time period less than double that required for Japanese alone.

The matter of content, it seems to me, is much more important than the considerable nuisance of time. Content is related to purpose, and purpose rises from value judgments about language study.

> "Language teachers have always argued that 'foreign languages are not only useful but necessary for an understanding of other peoples and other cultures.'"[6]

So reads a report by a seminar held in 1953 by the Modern Language Association. Noting that language teachers equate culture exclusively with that "which is admirable, superior, or desirable", the Report added:

> "Only rarely do they regard culture in the broader sociological sense of 'the whole range of customary activities of the members of a society.'"[6]

Eleven years later the Commission on International Understanding made this evaluation of language study:

> "There is no better example of wastefulness of college curricula than the prevailing pattern of instruction in foreign languages. Although the old grammar book in one hand and the dictionary in the other has been completely superseded, most American colleges that boast of a language requirement continue to turn out graduates who cannot speak the language they are supposed to have learned, let alone understand its characteristic subtleties of thought."[7]

Although one might quarrel with these evaluations, it does seem clear that what really mattered to their authors was that language teaching result in technical linguistic competence and understanding of the thought and values of a society.

To these general purposes could be added the development of the students' intellectual powers and the acquisition of perspective on his own society. For the student of Japanese one might add the appreciation of the Japanese "approach," if such there be, to the problems of man as depicted in Japanese literature, and the acquisition of a tool for interpersonal communication with Japanese people and for research in Japanese materials.

Individual students have their own reasons for studying Japanese, as do teachers for teaching it. Teachers in other disciplines also have reasons why their students "ought to study" the language. One general normative statement which might cover it all, is that the student should combine language training with one or more disciplines so that he will be "educated in ways that will enable him to respond intelligently to a world characterized by a plurality of cultures and pervasive change."[8]

The important question may not be "How is language training combined with another discipline?" for the stated purposes; but, rather, "Does language training really contribute in any meaningful way to comprehension of another discipline, say, history?" Or the reverse might usefully be asked, "Does the study of history enhance language ability?" Is the complementarity of these two pursuits such as to provide, in terms of trade-off, a really more significant intellectual capacity by combined study?

The answer to the last question is clear, I think, in the case of a student who expects to spend his career in Japanese history or a related scholarly pursuit. This particular student requires language competence in speaking, listening, composition, translation, and the flexibility to read colloquial Japanese, literary Japanese, epistolary Japanese and perhaps even kambun, depending on his specific interests. The impossible ideal, of course, is to strive for the competence of a native scholar in his field. People in this category are indispensable to the advance of Japanese studies, but they are a minority.

The complementarity of language and history is much less clear for the undergraduate who pursues both studies. The undergraduate "requirement" may consist of two years of the language divided roughly and inaccurately into beginning, intermediate or even advanced stages. Throughout the student struggles with unfamiliar sentence patterns, a lexicon of non-cognate words, and tries to get some grasp of a social organization which is different in important and numerous aspects from his own. He is unlikely to acquire a knowledge of the written language which allows him even to read most common signs or geographical names in Japanese. The extent of the vocabulary is suggested by the fact that in a given month one Japanese newspaper is likely to include about 14,000 different words.[9] This is one problem.

The problem which mostly concerns the history teacher is whether the language experience contributes in any meaningful way to an understanding of Japanese history.

Any assessment of the complementarity presupposes some estimate of the objectives of the study of history. There are many answers to this, but most begin with the acquiring of a variable "body of knowledge"

which in turn needs to be organized or integrated by "approaches," "interpretations," or sets of "concepts" which in turn suggest something more significant that the sum of the mass of data standing alone.

In history one deals with "interpretations" which vary according to the historical context of the person writing history, and with the individual approach of the historian. Some interpretations are of major consequence. For instance, Professor Hall (in Japanese History) states that the

> "...question dominant in the minds of most writers on the first fifty years of the modern Japanese state is 'How did Japan create the political and social order under which it became a world power?"[10]

Let us assume that the "how" of Japan's "emergence as a modern state" is a vital concern of the student of Japanese history. Can language study contribute to its understanding? I question that it can. For instance, some of the vocabulary which needs to be understood includes words, or concepts such as "feudal", "family", "village", and "nationalism" - all of which refer to phenomena markedly different from those in Europe.[11] A student of Japanese who learns only the translations for these words really doesn't learn anything useful; in fact, he probably misleads himself into thinking he understands the words he uses. Even advanced students of Japanese who are linguistically competent to read scholarly articles on such subjects in Japanese find them difficult, not from language, but from content. A lack of understanding of their meanings in other contexts inhibits comprehension of their meaning in the Japanese context.

Organization of data by interpretative approaches is supplemented by conceptualization. As a discipline, history seems comparatively to

lack sophisticated concepts so useful, for instance, to the linguist or political scientist. The latter makes good use of concepts such as "nationalism", "balance of power", "national interest", and the idea of a "structural-functional approach" to the comparative study of political systems. All in all, such ideas have utility for the historian, but the student of Japanese history will not have his competence in manipulating such ideas assisted by language study. This is an important aspect of the trade-off in buying at the margin. The time an undergraduate student of history spends in language study could more profitably be used to take courses in anthropology, literature in translation, political science or sociology.

Now let me consider the student of Japanese history at any level who does not undertake any language study. At first glance, it might seem that the Japanese language could be of no consequence to him except insofar as it reflects in general terms such things as the social significance of variant levels of speech or the difficulties occasioned by the complexity of the writing system. This initial impression is not accurate, for the non-linguist student of history must deal in some way with Romanized Japanese terms used in his English language texts. If students decide this is a problem, as some have, it becomes a problem.

A check was made of the Japanese vocabulary in five "standard" works[12] in English which every student of Japanese history might be expected to read. It produced a glossary of about 430 lexical items which did not include such things as quotations, weights, measures, Japanese titles of books or laws and regulations (such as chian iji hoo, Peace Preservation Law), or words such as geisha, sake or kuzu.

Retention of even a portion of so many foreign words imposes no mean burden on the student. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that

knowledge of these words might serve two purposes: (1) for the non-language history student, it might introduce Japanese words for concepts or aspects of the Japanese value system in ways more useful than an English approximation, and (2) for the language student, it might reinforce his language training.

To test these possibilities, the glossary was analyzed in two ways: (1) for currency, or relevancy to an active vocabulary of general use, and (2) according to general categories of meaning. The basis for these judgments was Kenkyuusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary (edited by Katsumata Senkichiroo, Tokyo, 1954), a general use dictionary containing about 100,000 entries.

About 150 items, or more than one-third of the total of 430, were apparently judged to be of such low use level that it was not worthwhile to include them among the 100,000 entries in the Dictionary. This group of Japanese terms does have a high degree of specificity and refers to things well-known in the past but not today. Examples of the unlisted items include onmyoo ryoo (The Bureau of Ying and Yang, translated into English with Chinese), and rinji (an imperial command of the 14th century issued in the name of, but not bearing, the sign of the soveriegn). Some apply to occupational groups such as the shashaku and bashaku ("carters" and "teamsters", respectively) and could be eliminated usefully by simple translation. On the other hand, some items seems to defy a standard translation, for example, the term bansho shirabedokoro is variously translated-by Sansom as "Foreign Documents Office"[13] and by Reischauer as "Institute for Investigation of Barbarian Books".[14]

The 280 items which do appear in Kenkyuusha have already been classified by usage by the editors. Approximately 100 of them have

special classifications such as archaic, literary, obsolete and so forth. (A complete listing by classification is found in the attached annex.) Half of these words are "archaic", that is, they were used prior to the Edo Period (1600-1868). Thus, including the non-listed words and those with special usage, 65% of the Romanized Japanese words used in English language texts are of little consequence to the student is learning Japanese and constitute and unwelcome obstacle to the non-linguist student of Japanese history. The remaining 35% of the glossary should be part of the linguists general use vocabulary.

The second method of analysis was by general category of meaning. The criteria of classification was purely subjective and sometimes ambiguous. Nevertheless, with some certainty, one could estimate that about 60% of the vocabulary items refer to government and administration, and to socio-economic phenomena. A large number of terms refer to high level governmental offices, titles and organizations; for instance, terms for Chancellor (dajoo daijin), Ministers of the Left and Right (sadaijin and ûdaijin), Council of Elders (roo juu), Senior Statemen (juushin) and the organization called the sangi-in. Differentiations were necessary within social, or military groups,; for example, the foot soldier (ashigaru), footmen accompanying the samurai (chuugen), bannerman (hatamoto), soldier monks (soohei) and subaltern (wakatoo).

The terms I have just listed and many similar terms denote status or function within a government, or within a military system far removed from our own experience or tradition. Hence they may be used for historical specificity.

It is probably true that writers of history do use foreign words for reasons cogent to them, but I am not certain that their use, except in very limited cases, contributes to the reader's understanding in any

important way. One might argue the case to the contrary -- that the use of foreign words impedes the student's understanding and is needlessly repetitious in that English approximations necessarily are used to explain the foreign word. Such usage is an outright hindrance to the non-linguist student and only slightly less so for the student of Japanese. The vocabulary the latter does encounter will not reinforce his language training except at a rather advanced and specialized level.

If it be true that writers of Japanese history in English use a fairly large number of Japanese words, what observations might be made about writers of books on modern Japanese politics?

Among other things, political scientists may describe a political system, its structure, its functions, and explain attitudes and concepts interacting with its operations and perhaps estimate its effectiveness. Within such as context, where a society's values are of vital importance, one might expect the use of foreign words to explicate the entire system. But this does not seem to be the case with political scientists writing about Japan -- and the contrast to historians is genuinely remarkable.

This observation is substantiated by a review of three political science works on Japan.[15] One book used eight Japanese words; another used seven. And these words included daimyoo, hara-kiri, ukiyoe, and demokurashii. The third work consulted demonstrates that it is possible to write a book titled Government and Politics in Japan without using a single Japanese word in the text!

Some explanation of this difference is probably in order. Earlier I suggested that writers felt a need to distinguish among the various military ranks and among various government officers or functions....in

times past. To use Japanese words to describe Japan's political organization or the ranks in the military forces today would be superfluous. Generally speaking, military forces throughout the world are so similar in most aspects that special distinctions connoted by foreign words simply are not necessary. Perhaps political forms, like military forces, have converged to a similar degree.

My observations today have been almost completely subjective, but if they have any validity at all, it is to suggest two general conclusions: (1) Training in the Japanese language has utility at every level for generally recognized purposes, but such instruction should not be expected to assist a student materially in understanding Japanese history and for most students, time spent in learning language might better be used for disciplines related to history (2) Conversely, it seems the study of Japanese history does not complement language training to a significant degree.

END NOTES

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